

# Costa Rica

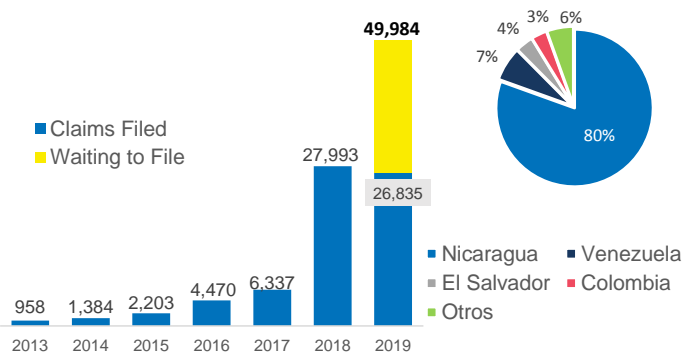
October 2019

Costa Rica is a host country to asylum-seekers primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean, and is a transit point for others. Over the past five years, the country has experienced an upward trend in the number of asylum applications received as a result of political unrest and violence in the region.

Since the onset of the socio-political crisis in Nicaragua in April 2018, over 70,000 individuals have sought asylum in Costa Rica, with more expected to arrive. UNHCR works with the Costa Rican Government to support persons in need of international protection.

UNHCR expanded its operation in the in 2018 by opening a field office to assist the Government's response to the influx of Nicaraguan asylum-seekers entering through various points along the northern border. At a policy level, the framework for the multi-sectoral refugee response is outlined in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (MINARE).

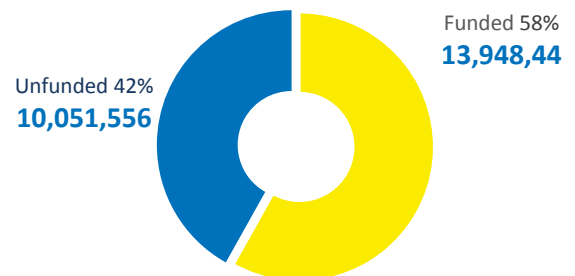
## Asylum seekers per year and nationality Jan 2013 – Sept 2019



## 2019 FUNDING (As of October)

# USD 24 M

Requested for the Costa Rican Operation



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

**41** National Staff

**11** International Staff

**62%** Female

**38%** Male

*Does not include government staff funded by UNHCR*

### Offices:

**1** Country Office in San Jose

**1** Field Office in Upala



# Main Activities

## Protection

UNHCR Costa Rica works to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance protection through a variety of interventions and activities for asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR advocates for safe access to territory, *non-refoulement*, no sanctions for irregular entry, effective registration, ensured access to a fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedure, timely issuance of documentation, and access to basic rights and services. It also encompasses strengthening the response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child protection, and comprehensive care for persons with specific protection needs.

### **Community-Based Protection (CBP):**

This strategy aims to reduce protection risks and vulnerabilities while fostering peaceful co-existence and integration. In the northern region, the CPB strategy launched in August 2019 with collaboration from the Government and partners. UNHCR has conducted introductory sessions in 27 communities in Upala and Los Chiles to promote community participation and empowerment, as well as to identify and appoint community representatives. In addition, communication with PoC is being strengthened to provide direct information, and community initiatives are supported to promote integration through sports and community activities. In San Jose, the office will begin implementing its CBP strategy to ensure information reaches asylum seekers and refugees. This complements information campaigns occurring throughout the year to raise awareness about the asylum process, refugee rights, and services provided. An information center is available since 2018 to receive inquiries from persons of concern, with an average of 460 calls per month.

### **Asylum System Strengthening:**

In line with the MINARE framework, UNHCR supports the Migration Authority in system strengthening to effectively and efficiently respond to asylum cases. To address the influx of asylum-seekers in Costa Rica, UNHCR provides technical support the Refugee Unit in San Jose and Upala, including with funding of human resources, infrastructure, and capacity building. The National Children's Protection Institute and the Migration Authority also receive support to increase the adjudication capacity to better mitigate the risk of long waiting times.

### **Legal advice and assistance:**

UNHCR provides legal information and assistance to prospective asylum-seekers on issues related to the asylum process, as well as access to other rights, including admission to the territory and non-refoulement.

### **Special needs:**

UNHCR has led the Multi-Functional Team on SGBV prevention and response, which is fully operational, with the participation of the National Children's Protection Institute, the National Women's Institute, the Migration Authority, and UNHCR partner agencies, and some municipalities. Safe houses are also available for SGBV survivors, female asylum seeker, their children, and LGBTI+ persons. In addition, psychosocial services are provided for an increasing number of survivors of torture and violence.

To further expand its child protection response and assist Nicaraguan asylum seeker and refugee children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated (UASC), UNHCR provides ongoing technical assistance to national entities to ensure early identification of children-at-risk, including UASC, and appropriate responses. At December 2018, there were 266 minors, of which 52 were unaccompanied and 214 separated.

To advance on the eradication of the risk of statelessness, UNHCR works with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal/Civil Registry. As part of a MoU signed with the tribunal, the Chriticos Project was launched in 2014. It is an initiative for cross-collaboration between Costa Rica and Panama to address issues of low birth registry of the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people. In 2018, the Civil Registry adopted the project to implement at a national level. These activities

are coupled with technical support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the body responsible for the status determination of stateless individuals, and the Government, on the evaluation process 'towards zero statelessness'.

### **Emergency preparedness:**

UNHCR works with the Emergency Committee in Upala and participates in the Interinstitutional Coordination Committee in La Cruz and Los Chiles cantons. UNHCR participated in the first line response of a flash flood emergency in July and has since committed to providing space in a warehouse for emergency supplies (CRI, drinkable water, and food supplies). Three community centers are also under renovation to serve as emergency shelters in case of a man-made or natural disaster.

## **Livelihoods**

UNHCR livelihoods initiatives increase individuals' self-reliance and promote economic inclusion by removing barriers to income generating activities, through vocational or technical capacity building and by increasing PoC access to the labour markets.

The Living Integration Program, through initiatives such as the Living Integration Seal and different employment and entrepreneurship actions developed jointly with the Costa Rican government and partner agencies, seeks to assist asylum seekers and refugees in their local integration. Nearly 2,000 refugees have benefitted from this initiative since 2014.

## **Multipurpose Cash-Based Intervention**

UNHCR implements a multipurpose cash-based intervention (CBI) to provide immediate assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers. These non-conditional, unrestricted cash grants provide a timely response, allowing prioritized individuals and families to address their most critical needs and support integration into their host communities. Between June and August, socioeconomic evaluations were conducted throughout San Jose's metropolitan region as well as in the northern cantons of Upala and Los Chiles. Through this exercise, 1,961 households received a cash grant – 1,277 in San Jose and 684 in Upala and Los Chiles cantons. For three months, families will receive USD 450 in San Jose and USD 200 in the northern region. The difference in amount is to adjust for cost of living. In addition to the grant, families received financial training and obtained access to legal advice and other services from implementing partners.

## **Partnerships and coordination**

UNHCR's main governmental counterparts in Costa Rica are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior (*Gobernacion*), and the Migration Authority (DGME). Other ministries that play key roles in the work of UNHCR include: the Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN), the National Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), and the National Children's Institute (PANI).

UNHCR supports the Government of Costa Rica in the implementation of MINARE, which is the national chapter of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (CRRF) and represents Costa Rica's contribution to the Regional Comprehensive Response Framework (MIRPS). The MINARE offers a multi-sectoral whole-of-society response to the situation of refugees and other persons in need of international protection, and it is a model for the protection and integration of urban refugees in middle income countries. The MINARE engages a diverse range of stakeholders including various ministries, civil society and faith-based organizations, academia, institutions, UN agencies, and the private sector.

Through private sector partnerships, synergies with key private sector partners and foundations are sought to promote public awareness and diversify the number of organizations that can contribute to UNHCR's work in Costa Rica.

As the leading agency for international refugee protection, UNHCR works to support the Government in conjunction with key partner agencies.

- **HIAS:** Provides legal counseling and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as border monitoring in the northern and southern region.
- **RET:** Responds to specific protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers including case management and psychosocial support, community based protection and sectoral cash grants.
- **The Center for the Social Rights of Migrants (CENDEROS):** Implements protection and integration programs for refugees and asylum-seekers, with special emphasis on support for survivors of SGBV and LGBTI individuals in extreme vulnerability.
- **Fundación Mujer:** Executes livelihood and self-sufficiency activities which include support for job placement, skills training, and business development activities.
- **University for Peace:** Provides a temporary shelter program for high risk individuals from northern Central America, including with English classes, psychosocial support for those in transit to a third host country.
- **La Salle University:** A partner agency since 2017, La Salle University has assisted more than 5,000 individuals with legal advice on the RSD process, statelessness, and the naturalization process.
- **Fundación Crisalida Internacional – Glasswing:** Provides access to educational materials for schools, teacher training, spaces for group psychosocial support, safe recreational spaces for minors, and prevention of xenophobia and bullying.
- **Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Costa Rica):** Improves the living conditions of children and adolescents and their families and communities, through interventions that allow the reduction of violations of children's rights, girls and adolescents, ensuring their right to a decent and quality life.

## Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the support provided by donors contributing to this operation.

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### LINKS

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